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ABSTRACT

One of a series of materials developed by Project APT (Administrators, Parents, and Teachers/Assessment, Programing, and Training), a program designed to foster home/school coordination in educational planning and program implementation for severely mentally retarded and/or multiply handicapped students: the booklet focuses on techniques for behavior control. Among the 13 strategies discussed are planned ignoring, proximity control, interest boosting, use of humor as a release, removal of seductive objects, and separation of agitators. A 24 item bibliography is included. (PHR)

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PREVENTIVE PLANNING FOR BEHAVIOR CONTROL

A Project APT Resource Manual

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PREVENTIVE PLANNING FOR BEHAVIOR CONTROL

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Dear Parents and Teachers,

We are a group of professionals who spend much of our time with severely handicapped children and their families.

As we have watched, taught, and learned from these children, we have heard many questions that teachers and parents commonly ask. One that comes up repeatedly is "What should I do when . . .?"

Knowing that we could not write a manual that would answer each question specifically, we elected to compile a booklet of suggestions oriented toward preventing major behavior problems from occurring. The preventive techniques suggested herein are not intended to be a substitute for a consistent behavior management program. For chronic problems and recurring behaviors it is advised that a formal behavior program be developed and monitored. However, with many periodic occurrences these intermediary procedures may help in

1. preventing full-scale outbursts
2. continuing to promote a positive atmosphere
3. maintaining sanity

As you read this booklet, it is expected that you will recognize, and find logical many of these strategies. They are neither unique nor innovative but their application requires a blend of creativity and a discerning eye.

Many of the techniques are meant to be used with individual children while others might be just as effective in a group setting.

We hope you will find the strategies useful and that they will make your "bag of tricks" fuller.

Sincerely yours,

The APT Team

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Planned Ignoring

"Why doesn't she notice. me? Maybe I'll do it louder. Nope, she still doesn't turn around . . . forget it!"

Planned ignoring is a common behavioral technique used in many management systems. It is the practice of the parent or teacher not tuning in to a behavior designed to "get your goat." The student banging on the table to gain attention quickly tires of the activity when no one appears to notice.

In many cases a child will run through a repertoire of "crummy" behaviors, discarding one and attempting another, to get the desired result—attention. When attention is withheld, the child may eventually give up and settle down. Planned ignoring is followed up by giving positive attention when the child eventually conforms.

Nonverbal Signals

In some situations and with some children, parents and teachers can interrupt and discourage a behavior by using a nonverbal signal. Parents as well as teachers are masters at creating signals that communicate messages of disapproval. We all have stares, frowns, finger snaps, body postures, hand gestures, and coughs that clue the recipient in to our displeasure at what he or she is doing. Such nonverbal strategies communicate, "I know what you're doing, and it is unacceptable."

This preventive technique is often most effective if used at the beginning stages of misbehavior and can be effective both with individual children as well as groups.

In stark contrast to the previously described method of ignoring inappropriate behavior, this strategy is one of recognizing and interfering with the behavior by using a nonverbal cue.

Listed below are some possible signals for consideration.

1. Eye Contact
   a) Redirecting child by indicating through eye contact where he or she is supposed to be
   b) Staring to alert child that behavior is inappropriate
   c) Frowning to indicate displeasure
   d) Using questioning look to ask child if he or she is doing work

2. Startle Techniques
   a) Snapping fingers
   b) Tapping table in front of child
   c) Clapping hands
   d) Making any other loud, startling noise

Note: These techniques should not be overused as they tend to excite children, and must be accompanied by a quiet voice explaining to the child what he or she is supposed to be doing.

3. Posturing
   a) Placing hands on hips
   b) Quickly rising from sitting position
   c) Raising hand to indicate attention
   d) Crossing arms over chest
   e) Pointing to where child is supposed to be
   f) Pointing to what child is supposed to be doing

Proximity Control

Proximity control is simply moving closer to a child who appears to be having trouble controlling his or her impulses. In this situation, the parent or teacher becomes a source of strength and protection to the child.

When teaching small groups, teachers automatically position themselves next to the fidgety child so as to be available for control. It then becomes an unobtrusive follow-up step to quietly place a firm hand on the child's arm, knee, or shoulder if additional control is needed. Parents likewise place themselves strategically at the dinner table and other group situations to avoid disruptions.

With some children, proximity control needs to be reversed, with the parent or teacher moving away from the "acting out" child. This technique is then coupled with planned ignoring to remove any source of adult reinforcement.

Likewise, peers and siblings can be used effectively as vehicles in proximity control. By removing the child from social interaction and peer reinforcement, inappropriate behavior can be decreased.

In some instances, a particular child or sibling may have a "calming" effect. In such a situation, the two young people could be moved in closer proximity to build appropriate behaviors.

3

Interest Boosting

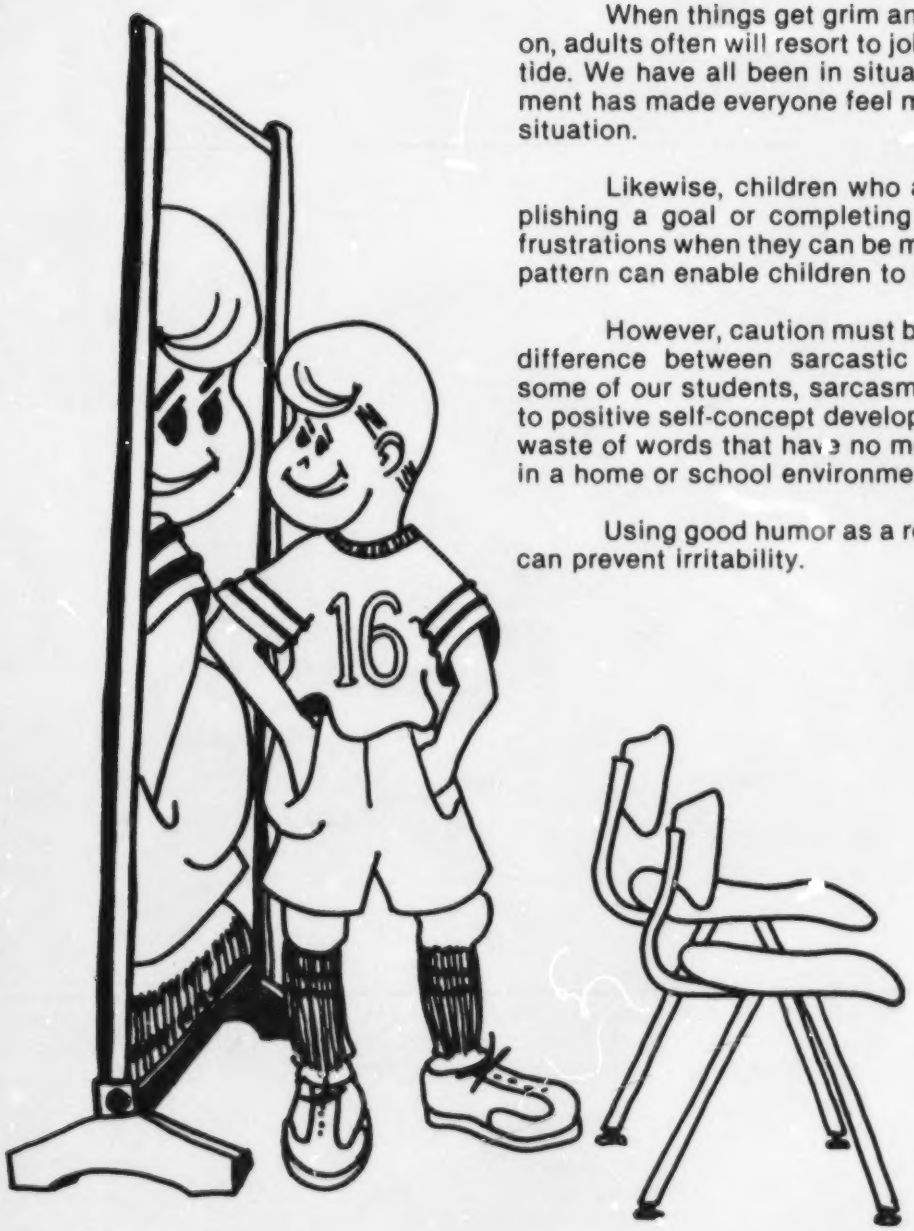
Interest boosting is simply that! When a child's interest in an activity begins to wane and the chance for off-task behavior increases, the teacher or parent may prevent problems by giving the activity "a shot in the arm." If the adult will focus attention on the child and what he or she is doing, in many cases the child will show renewed interest.

Being sensitive to the interest and frustration level of the child will give the teacher a gauge for knowing when to offer assistance and/or reinforcement.

In addition, making slight changes in an activity or adding an additional element to a task may make it more exciting. For example, a child who has successfully put pegs in a pegboard for five minutes may continue the activity if the task is changed slightly to duplicating a pattern on the pegboard.

In summary, the parent or teacher may prevent boredom or misbehavior by being sensitive to the child's need for reinforcement, helping the child over a troublesome hurdle, or altering an activity.

Using Humor as a Release



When things get grim and the time of day drags on and on, adults often will resort to jokes and good humor to turn the tide. We have all been in situations where a well-timed comment has made everyone feel more comfortable in an anxious situation.

Likewise, children who are having difficulty in accomplishing a goal or completing a task often will forget their frustrations when they can be made to laugh. Such a break in a pattern can enable children to start with a fresh beginning.

However, caution must be exercised. There is a world of difference between sarcastic and appropriate humor. For some of our students, sarcasm can be erosive and damaging to positive self-concept development; for others, sarcasm is a waste of words that have no meaning and, certainly, no value in a home or school environment.

Using good humor as a release can be constructive and can prevent irritability.

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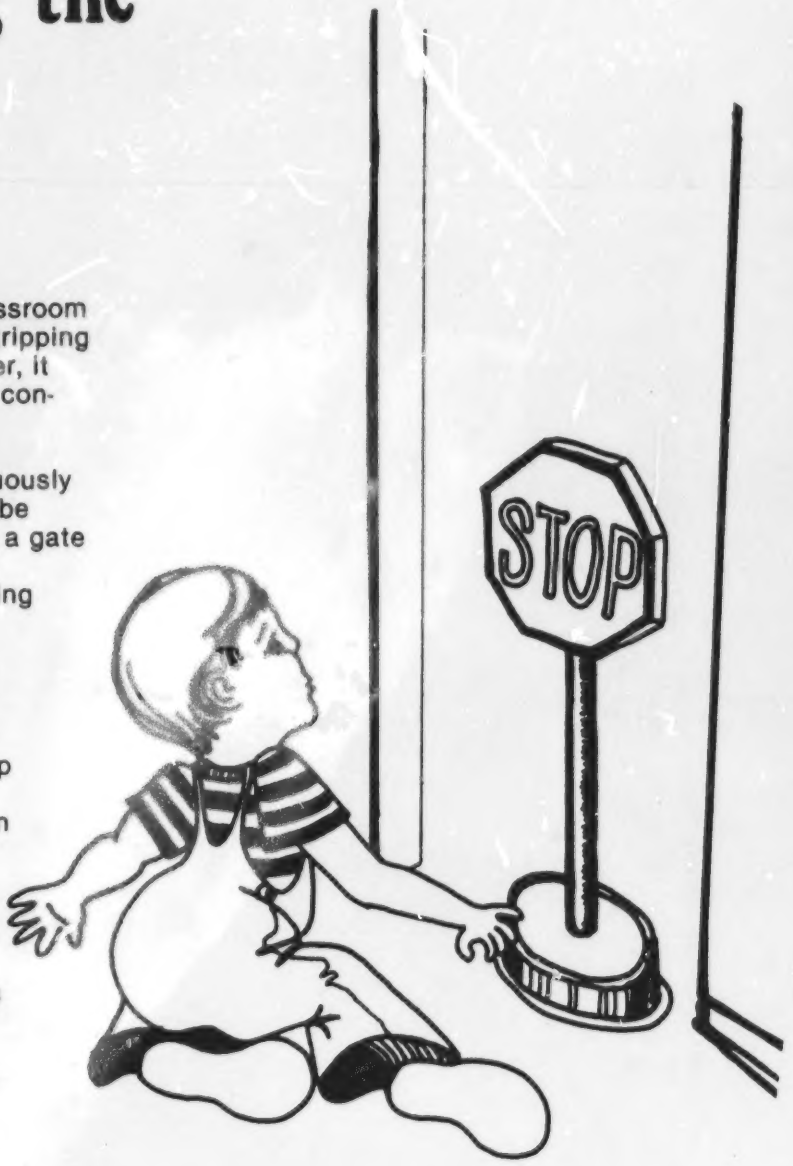
Restructuring the Environment



Restructuring the home or classroom environment does not mean totally stripping or altering the physical setting. Rather, it means designing the area to prevent constant conflict.

For the student who is continuously running out of the classroom, it may be easier and more productive to mount a gate on the door frame as a deterrent and reminder than to be constantly "playing chase."

With the child who is working on refining eating skills and table manners, the parent may prevent intentional spilling by supplying the cup to the child only when it is time for drinking. Then gradually, this skill can be refined by teaching the child to handle the cup properly after actual drinking skills have been acquired. These examples merely point out the line of thinking that may be helpful when similar environmental problems are confronted.

Other suggestions for restructuring the environment that may be useful with small groups of students are as follows:

1. Turn lights off to signal termination of activity or redirection to another task
2. Shut door to indicate need to come together as a group
3. Change standing or seating pattern of teacher or child
4. Display actual signs to signal new activity, e.g., green light sign, in learning center areas
5. Use bell to signal change of activity, time for supper

Restructuring the Classroom/Home Program

Every day in our interactions with others, we "read" the climate, the atmosphere, and the vibes around us. In working with severely handicapped children as with all children, it benefits them, and us, if we are sensitive to the "feelings" in the situation.

We have all been in a classroom or at the dinner table where the participants are tense, bored, or anxious. In such a situation, then, it is necessary to make a decision. Our choices may include:

1. Dropping the activity right where it is and taking a break
2. Shortening what's going on
3. Redirecting the participants' attention to something different
4. Redirecting the structure of the activity by adding new elements
5. Changing to a new activity

Practice has indicated that our students react most favorably to an alternating schedule of active-passive activities. Keeping this in mind can help in preventing problems.

The following guidelines for parents have been adapted from *The Exceptional Parent Magazine*. These points have obvious merit for both parents and teachers when implementing home and school instructional programs. It seems appropriate to include these ideas in this section.

1. Make the learning situation positive—it is not intended to be a punishment, and must be worthwhile for parent, teacher and child.

2. Make working with a child enjoyable for the parents.

3. Keep the teaching session short—end the session on a positive note, and stop before anyone is pushed to the limit.

4. Whenever possible, require the child to perform activities which can be observed and recorded—this requires the child to be actively participating in the activity and the effectiveness of the effort can then be monitored.

5. Provide feedback for work well done.

6. Use a quiet and comfortable work location to minimize distractions and avoid struggles.

7. Plan sessions for a time which is convenient for both you and your child—avoid late evening, right after school and those times that conflict with favorite TV shows or other prized activities.

8. Keep learning task within the ability of the child.

9. Personalize the learning activity whenever possible—relate the activity to the interests of the child, e.g., animals, sports.

10. Present the child with situations in which he or she can apply new knowledge.

"Hup, Two, Three, Four"

All children profit from knowing the order and schedule of activities as well as the rules and structure of the environment.

It is advisable to provide severely handicapped students with a predictable routine that offers stability. Obviously, such knowledge of schedule develops from experience through repetition. This repetition does not, however, imply that a routine need be so rigid as to never allow diversity and special events. Rather, it means that severely retarded individuals need to know where, in what order, and to whom they are to report.

Moreover, these students react best in an environment where home and school rules are clear, concise, concrete, and consistent. Consequences of behaviors are learned through repetition, and a consistent routine fosters this learning.

By providing the child with support from the routine, prevention of inappropriate behaviors can be considerably increased.

Removing Seductive Objects

"Put that down."
"Close the cupboard."
"I told you not to touch that!"
Ahhh!

How often we repeat over and over the same directions and corrections. The technique of removing seductive objects follows very closely with the previous strategy, "Changing the Environment," but pertains more specifically to objects.

Because some expensive, dangerous and/or breakable objects, materials, and equipment seem to have a magnetic appeal for children, parents and teachers need to evaluate the usefulness of removing these objects from the immediate environment. Again, it is not the intention of this suggestion to advocate denuding the location but merely to encourage parents and teachers to control the use and appreciation of appealing items.

Gradually then, parents can reintroduce seductive items in a structured manner offering an opportunity for proper instruction. Benefitting from this systematic approach, the child can build self-control as well as skills for effectively using these materials.

If it is impossible to remove certain items that are causing difficulty, such as a television or stereo system from the environment, a formal behavior management program may need to be devised with built-in positive consequences and control measures.

"Quiet Time Quiet Place"

When a student's behavior reaches a point where verbal controls do not appear to be working, a parent or teacher may effectively avoid an outburst by offering a quiet time in a quiet place, a non-punishment time-out alternative. Designating one area of the room as a retreat in which to collect oneself is a way to do this.

Some suggested "quiet places" are listed below. It is advised that such a place be used as a "get control of myself" area and not duplicate its function as a punishment area. Obviously, there may be times when a child will need to be timed out as a result of inappropriate behavior but such procedure and space should be separate. For directing a student to a quiet space, the verbal direction of "It's time to go to your quiet space" accompanied by necessary physical assistance, such as arm around shoulder, is suggested. The time spent in the "quiet space" will vary depending on the need of the individual student.

Suggested quiet places

Home:

- bottom step in main hallway
- sofa in non-occupied room
- hallway
- kitchen table
- front steps of house
- bedroom (not to be used as a punishment)
- any place where atmosphere is pleasant but stimulation is limited

Classroom:

- quiet corner with pillows
- rocking chair
- sitting area with sofa, chairs
- outside, e.g., to go for a walk
- outside classroom, e.g., to get drink of water
- carrel or built cubby
- any place where atmosphere is pleasant but stimulation is limited

Separating Agitators

"Give Tony back his coat."
"Keep your hands to yourself."
"Now *you* sit in *this* chair and *you* sit in *this* chair, and don't move."

Whether we call it sibling rivalry or classroom conflicts, we all recognize those times of the day, those groups of children, or those activities that breed agitation and irritability.

One common technique that is utilized in reducing friction and avoiding full-scale battle is that of merely separating students who are troubling one another.

When assigning students to centers in the classroom or arranging play activities for siblings at home, it is wise to consider the blend of personality and behavior that will be achieved. For those children who have difficulty interacting, social skills and development of cooperation can be broken into small steps and taught systematically. Less interactive activities such as listening to a story offer a starting place for children to begin tolerating each other. From there activities can be planned which gradually decrease the teacher's or parents' role and increase the childrens' independence in playing and interacting.

Physical or Mechanical Restraint

In some instances, a child may need physical or mechanical assistance to help him or her maintain self-control. In such a situation, the teacher or parent should use the least restrictive restraint possible in order to successfully prevent disruptive or abusive behavior.

Physical restraint includes such techniques as leading a child by the arm from one point to another or directing a child by holding both arms from behind.

Mechanical restraints include such devices as a wide, cloth belt to restrain the student in a chair or a stiff, padded device strapped to the arm above and below the elbow to prevent self-abuse to the face.

Physical and mechanical restraints are preventive measures to be used only:

1. when other behavioral techniques have been tried and found unsuccessful
2. to the restriction necessary and not as a punitive measure
3. in coordination with both home and school with explicit parent and administrative approval

Using a physical or mechanical restraint is a preventive technique that requires careful consideration and needs to be specifically individualized to the needs of the young person.

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